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## Elessar Telcontar Magnus, Rex Pater Gondor, Restitutor Imperii

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**Elessar Telcontar Magnus, Rex Pater Gondor, Restitutor Imperii**

**Cover Page Footnote**

All recommended changes made and corrected

*Elessar Telcontar Magnus, Rex Pater Gondor, Restitutor Imperii*

*'Verily, for in the high tongue of old I am Elessar, the Elfstone, and the Renewer [...]'*

## I. Introduction

Germanic heroic epics are, in part, defined by two motifs. The first motif is *wyrd*, a concept of fate that represents what is done and the consequences of what is done, rather than what is preordained to happen.<sup>1</sup> The second motif is what Tolkien (*BMC*, 20) called “the theory of Northern courage,” that is, the defiant Germanic warrior-ethos that responds to (or generates) the consequences of *wyrd*. The interaction, tension, conflict, and the elaborate chain of cause-and-effect of these two motifs constitute a great deal of the ‘*Stoff*’<sup>2</sup> of Germanic heroic epic.

In Tolkien’s *Legendarium*, the intradiegetic Elvish historical narrative is a narrative exemplified by *wyrd* and its corollary Northern courage. The “wheel of fortune” turns from innocence in Valinor towards the ‘Long Defeat’ by means of Fëanor’s freedom to choose<sup>3</sup> not to surrender the Silmarils to the Vala Yavanna (Gallant 2021, forthcoming) and his hamartia of the Kin-slaying (Gallant 2014, 116-120). The Elvish narrative is one of downward movement which Northrop Frye describes as “... a tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe.” The eventual price to be paid from Fëanor’s (and consequently the Noldor’s) choices is that the Elves leave Middle-earth in their Tragic Autumn (following Frye’s terminology).

In contrast to Fëanor, Aragorn’s choices (such as his choice and determination to pursue the renewal of Gondor) are morally correct and he uses his gifts (such as freely choosing Ilúvatar’s

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tom Shippey (*Road*, 172-73).

<sup>2</sup> Themes, motifs and subject matter. Cf. Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte*. 10th ed. Vol. 300 Kröners Taschenausgabe (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner 2005).

<sup>3</sup>When freedom of choice contradicts the divine plan, *wyrd* serves a corrective and judicial function to return to the divine plan. This includes the use and misuse of gifts, which originate from the divine. In this context, they would include the light encased within the Silmarils and even Fëanor’s exceptionally creative talent. The misuse of these gifts is an affront to providence and the divine plan and *wyrd* may be invoked to correct the misuse. *Wyrd*, therefore, is subservient to providence.

divine gift of death to Men) according to the divine plan. This negates the need to invoke *wyrd* as a corrective function to realign Men to Ilúvatar's divine plan.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the old warrior-ethos of Northern courage wanes with Elvish *wyrd*.

What, then, replaces this warrior-ethos bound inextricably to the Doom of the Noldor? Surely there is still heroism in Middle-earth; *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are both filled with heroism, and not just by the Elves! Answers may lie in Aragorn's exemplary nature *ad bonum exemplum* of Tolkien's ideal heroic ethos. An ethos that appropriately emerges in the ideal Renewal King at the beginning of the Age of Men. Aragorn's task is to renew the heroic ethos, because as the Elves have experienced, strictly following the ethos of Northern courage leads to 'the long defeat'.

Aragorn's great heroic deeds and ethos originate from the core tradition of Elvish Northern courage. These heroic deeds constitute a new, proto-chivalric heroic ethos and heroic identity. This happens in three ways: firstly, Aragorn's character is structured as an *exemplum* of a Renewal or Restoration King. Thomas Honegger (forthcoming, 8) writes that Aragorn-Elessar is

one of the most 'archetypical' characters in *The Lord of the Rings*" who "becomes 'the ideal prototype' for all later rulers and the numerous parallels to kings historical, semi-historical, mythical or fictional are intended and the result of Tolkien's (successful) attempt to create an archetypical figure.

This ideal prototype of the ideal king embodies the communal values of a new heroic ethos. The new heroic ethos, in its ideal moral<sup>5</sup> (or *sententia*), "effects the [communal] value's reemergence with the obligatory force of moral law" (Scanlon 1994, 34). Because Aragorn's career culminates as

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<sup>4</sup> For more concerning Fëanor's invocation of *wyrd* and its corrective function within the framework of the Alfredian tradition of the *De Consolatio Philosophiae*, see Richard Z. Gallant, "The Dance of Authority in Arda: Wyrd, Fate and Providence in the Elder Days of Middle-earth." (2021, forthcoming). Furthermore, one may think of the difference between the determined Aragorn of the text and the reluctant Aragorn Viggo Mortensen portrayed in Peter Jackson's work. If Jackson's conflicted Aragorn had chosen wrongly, then there may be a need for a corrective function to realign with the divine plan. This is not an issue to be considered with Tolkien's steadfast Aragorn.

<sup>5</sup> For Tolkien, it is the "heroism of obedience and love, not pride or willfulness, that is the most heroic and the most moving..." J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Homecoming of Beorhnoth Beorhthelm's Son." In *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins 2001), 121-150.

a Renewal King, certain themes are interwoven within his character from other traditions of *exempla* of the Renewal King figure, of which Charlemagne<sup>6</sup> provides an excellent example.

Secondly, Aragorn carries ancient core traditions (*Traditionskern*) and artifacts<sup>7</sup> reaching back to his ancestor and *Stammvater* (the tribal founder or “father”) Bëor the Old, which are vital to Aragorn’s legitimacy. The Ring of Barahir, although not a ‘Ring of Power’ is nevertheless a very powerful ring in that its power is symbolic of Aragorn’s pedigree and the core traditions of the Edain (Gallant 2020, forthcoming). It is a symbol of the “obedience and love;” the friendship and bond of Elves and Men; a reification of the love between King Finrod Felagund and Aragorn’s ancestors Barahir (*S*, 176) and his son, Beren (*ibid.* 198). Such traditions of pedigree, and heirlooms representing that pedigree, provide the foundation for Aragorn’s legal, moral, and cultural authority. Indeed, Aragorn’s narrative in *The Lord of the Rings* progressively enacts cultural authority (Scanlon 1994, 34) from his beginning in the shadows as Strider to his coronation – a cultural authority that needs legitimatization. That he carries ancient core traditions not only gives him identity and legitimacy as king but also serves to implement the authority to renew.

Thirdly, in the process of Gondor’s renewal, Aragorn ‘fuses’ the old traditions and ethos with the new. It is a fusing of the old unyielding will of Northern courage with a new merciful, mild, and just warrior-ethos. The “sad light of fatalism” (Stanley 2000, 94) of the ‘long defeat’ is replaced with the hope for the renewal of a golden age. The fusion constitutes a new, proto-chivalric warrior-ethos and identity. It is an ethos that resides in, again following Frye, the Romantic era of Summer appropriate for the new Era of Men in Middle-earth’s Fourth Age.

## II. Exemplum

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<sup>6</sup> See also, Elizabeth M. Stephen, *Hobbit to Hero: The Making of Tolkien’s King* (Moreton in Marsh (Gloucestershire): ADC Publications 2012), 183-185; and Michael D. C. Drout, ed. *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopaedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. (New York: Routledge 2007), s.v. “Elessar” and “Aragorn.”

<sup>7</sup> Cultural traditions and material artifacts that define the identity of a group of people. According to ethnogenesis theory (*Traditionskern*), these traditions and artifacts are carried by a small group of the aristocratic warrior elite that define themselves and their followers. Cf. Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag 1961).

Tolkien makes use of the narrative technique of illustrative narrative (*exemplum*). Illustrative narrative employs an agent, who by their actions, “illustrate” a moral. Fritz Kemmler (1984, 187) explains the function of these agents thusly:

... in illustrative narratives their [the agents’] function is clearly defined by the thematic base-structure underlying and determining the sequence of events depicted in a narrative. Agents are relevant in respect to the norms and values mediated in a narrative.

It is a device that is used to show modes of behavior to be either emulated or shunned by the actions of a protagonist or agent. Aragorn is an agent of his own illustrative narrative and functions as an ideal king prototype. Aragorn, as an agent, provides the thematic context, which is determined by a set of particular norms and values (the ideal king) which may be observed in a particular community (ibid. 181). The base structure is the theme of Aragorn becoming king, through the defeat of great evil, and the renewal of Gondor and Arnor for the Age of Men. The new norms and values are a fusion of heroic ethos as well as hope for the future. This new, hopeful heroic ethos lies in opposition to the previous, fatalistic ‘long defeat’ which, in the Elvish narrative had produced “some hypothesis of continuous degeneration from a Golden Age lost in Antiquity” (Frye 2000, 110).<sup>8</sup> Thus, Aragorn’s illustrative role in the narrative functions as “a traditional epic/romance hero who combines Northrop Frye’s romance and high mimetic modes” (Flieger 2012, 142) as a Renewal King. His mythological messianic role as redeemer is displaced by that of a human king of romance who renews a declining world. His task is to provide hope.

Aragorn’s conflict with the overpowering evil represented by Sauron seems to signal the final end for the Free Peoples of Middle-earth who really have no hope. Only Gandalf holds a *shred* of hope ‘There was never much hope,’ he says, ‘just a fool’s hope...’ (*RK*, V, iv, 88). Never *much* hope, of course, is not the same as no hope at all. The hope that Aragorn represents is expressed by his great deeds. Aragorn, as an exemplary agent, exemplifies norms and values that illustrate a moral because they recount the enactment of that moral, which establishes a form of authority (Scanlon 1994, 33).

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<sup>8</sup> See also Honegger 2011.

The exemplary nature of Aragorn's illustrative narrative is explicitly combined with cultural authority (Scanlon 1994, 4). He already possesses aspects of authority inherent in his character; for instance his bloodline gives him the authority and the willpower to confront Sauron in the palantír. Aragorn carries symbols of his pedigree, such as the Ring of Barahir and the Shards of Narsil/Andúril, which also bestow him with authority. This authority and legitimacy is already recognized by a core of elite warriors in the Dúnedain of the North, The Grey Company. Nonetheless, Aragorn, because he quite literally appears out of legend upon the Fields of Pelennor, recognizes the fact that he needs to earn the legitimacy as king from the people of Gondor – and without question. His *Traditionskern*, that is, his cultural core of tradition carried by him and his core *comitatus* of Dúnedain rangers of the North, enables him to gain his legitimacy and eventual coronation.

### III. Aragorn's *Traditionskern* and Northern Courage

Aragorn springs from the ethos of Northern courage in Middle-earth. He is of the Dúnedain, who are descended from the Númenóreans, who are in turn descended from the Edain (a “*Naturvölk*” or idyllic people) of the First Age. Christopher Hans Scarf (2007, 322) notes that “in his mythological ‘Story’ Tolkien’s heroic kings and their societies have their “deep roots” in the distant past.” Those ‘deep roots’ are what may be termed the core of tradition: “Traditionionskern, consisting of legends about ancestors and great deeds of the heroic past, carried the consciousness of these tribes for centuries” (Maas 2012, 75). The great deeds of the Edain’s past epitomize their Northern courage, such as Barahir’s shield wall.

The Battle of *Dagor Bragollach*<sup>9</sup> clearly illustrates the Northern courage of Men. The account is full of shield walls, desperate last stands and subsequent oaths of fealty between lord and liegeman:

The sons of Finarfin bore most heavily the brunt of the assault, and Angrod and Aegnor were slain; beside them fell Bregolas lord of the house of Bëor, and a great part of the

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<sup>9</sup> The first major battle against Morgoth in which Men participated.

warriors of that people. But Barahir the brother of Bregolas was fighting further westward, near the Pass of Sirion. The King Finrod Felagund, hastening from the south, was cut off from his people and surrounded with small company in the Fens of Serech; and he would have been slain or taken, but Barahir came up with the bravest of his men and rescued him, and made a wall of spears about him; and they cut their way out of the battle with great loss. Thus Felagund escaped, and returned to his deep fortress of Nargothrond; but he swore an oath of abiding friendship and aid in every need to Barahir and all his kin, and in token of his vow he gave Barahir his ring. Barahir was now rightful lord of the house of Bëor... (*S*, 176)

Aragorn is descended from this Edain warrior-elite caste which carries on old traditions of the heroic ethos and an almost *foederati*-like relationship<sup>10</sup> with the Eldar (Gallant 2020, forthcoming). These traditions sustain the identity of the tribe (for example the identity of the Dúnedain) by affording the community of Men an *origo gentes*. There is no evidence, however, that the Edain had their own traditional sense of ‘Northern courage’ previous to Finrod Felagund’s first encounter with them and the text quickly moves onto the process of their assimilation, or as I’ve discussed elsewhere, their ‘*Noldorization*'.<sup>11</sup> They assimilate quickly without, purposely, dwelling on their past veiled in shadow and therefore their prior culture is also shrouded in mystery. The Noldor, on the other hand, do in fact operate within the Germanic code of Northern courage (Gallant 2020, 25) and the text shows us the Edain’s Northern courage from this point onward, fighting relentlessly “in spite of feeling sure they were fighting a hopeless series of battles against the powerful Morgoth” (Scarf 2007, 334). Once the Edain are involved in the “Story” they take on the tradition of Northern courage and all it entails.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> That is, a similar relationship to that which Rome had with various tribes, peoples, and confederations who allied themselves with, and fought for, Rome.

<sup>11</sup> “a sort of acculturation process or *Romanization* is also occurring that is affecting identity. Perhaps we may coin this process *Noldorization*, as it has significant impacts on questions of ethnic identity of Men in the narrative. It is not an aggressive conquering policy the way Rome sometimes engaged in but rather a voluntary symbiotic endeavor on the parts of both the Edain and Noldor.” (Gallant 2020, forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Hans Scarf's views seem to support this discussion, and it is worth citing him in full: “Small wonder that the seemingly endless Wars of Beleriand in which Elven Kings (the “Gnomes”) and the Chieftains of the Men of the Three Houses of the Edain were involved, found heroes who fought relentlessly, in spite of *feeling* sure they were fighting a hopeless series of battles against the powerful Morgoth. Tolkien relates their plight as being like the Beowulfian “common tragedy of inevitable ruin.” He creates a vivid picture of ultimate despair, in which the “history of kings and warriors,” where “all glory ... ends in night.” [BMC, 23] Tolkien’s Chieftains of the Edain ‘develop’ into *Kings* as a reward for their consistency and their heroic efforts in these wars. One of their number, Eärendil, obtained aid from the Valar, by which Morgoth was defeated in the Last Battle. The Valar rewarded the Edain

This is an identity, modelled on the Germanic hero, that started in an ancient First Age with a chieftain-vassal / Elf-lord relationship between the Edain chieftain Bëor the Old (from whom Aragorn is descended) and the Noldo Fingolfin (Gallant 2020, forthcoming). The establishment of the Elf and Elf-friend power-structure functions as the “primal deed” of Edain origin (cf. S, 163-165). Herwig Wolfram (Wolfram 1997, 33) suggests that “[S]tories of origins speak of “genuine and old names,” in our case the “Edain”, which

sum up their origins in three motifs: First, once upon a time there was a small people [...] they set out [wandering] under divine guidance [...] The first test demanded the performance of a primordial deed, be it crossing of a sea like the Baltic or North Sea or a river like the Rhine, Elbe, or Danube, be it victorious [...] in a situation that seems all but hopeless, divine aid is given to a select groups of the homeless tribe. In this way the primordial deed establishes a new tribal identity, which derives its legitimacy and attraction from the nucleus of tradition, that is to say, from the group of leaders with better gods and organizational structure than exist in the world around them. Both qualities establish the superior status (*nobilitas*) of a people over its neighbors. Second, [...] a change of religion and cult takes place during the primordial deed; tradition presents this process also as a singular event [...] Third, if the primordial deed was a victory against mighty enemies, those remained the model enemy par excellence [...] What lived on in these sorts of stories was the memory that one’s own *gens* had once been a subordinate group within a larger tribal confederation from which it had broken away by force, thus triggering or accelerating the confederation’s downfall. (Wolfram 1997, 33-34)

Wolfram’s paradigm also applies to the Edain, and Aragorn as a *Traditionsträger*<sup>13</sup> (that is, one of the elites who remembers, instills and acts out the core traditions of a *gens*). For instance, the Dúnedain (west-men) carry the “genuine and old name” of the Edain (men) within its etymology and its accompanying cultural values and traditions, such as Aragorn’s ring.

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with the gift of the island realm of Númenor, and with the divinely authorized gift of Kingship, as Tolkien revealed it.” Christopher Hans Scarf, *The Ideal Kingship in the Writings of Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien*. Dissertation (Sussex: University of Sussex, 2007), 334.

<sup>13</sup> „So viel dürfte deutlich geworden sein, daß in allen Fällen ein kleiner traditionstragender Kern zum Kristallisierungspunkt einer Großstammbildung wurde. Das deckt sich mit den Erfahrungen der Ethnographen, die aus den verschiedensten Gegenden Beispiele dafür anführen können, wie an Zahl geringe "Traditionskompanien" gewaltige Expansionsbewegungen auslösen...“ Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1961), 75.

So much must have become clear that in all cases a small tradition-bearing core became the focal point of a large scale ethnogenesis. This coincides with the experience of the ethnographers, who are able to cite examples from the most diverse regions, such as the number of small "traditional companies [aka, the *comitatus* and accompanying warband]" that are showing tremendous expansive movements (*translation mine*)

Secondly, the Edain performed a “primal deed” consisting both of crossing the Blue Mountains (rather than the Rhine) and establishing themselves as “Elf-friends”, which instilled hope within their hearts. In so doing, they received “divine aid” (“even if once or twice removed”<sup>14</sup> (Honegger 2017, 11)) in the form of art and knowledge “and their sons increased in wisdom and skill, until they far surpassed all other of Mankind [*nobilitas*], who dwelt still east of the mountains and had not seen the Eldar, nor looked upon the faces that had beheld the Light of Valinor” and their “years were lengthened” (S, 173). They also, in their first major conflict, fight as vassals to the Elf Lords at the *Dagor Bragollach*, the Battle of Sudden Flame. Thereby they establish Morgoth and his armies as “model enemies” par excellence. There is no “change” of religion or cult but rather an enlightenment represented by the Valar and Eru Ilúvatar. It is an ontological difference that their brethren left behind do not, at this time, come to know. This core of tradition and its accompanying heroic ethos form the structural basis of the themes that support Aragorn’s claim to the throne of Gondor and his cultural authority.

For the reader, Scarf (2007, 264) notes “this deliberate “looking back” is a ‘structural’ device that creates verisimilitude by its interlacement through the narratives of the *Legendarium*. The reader more readily ‘receives’ the ‘Story’ as though it were about actual historic people, whose way of life had been philologically deduced.” On an intradiegetic level, that is as a secondary-world history written for a secondary-world audience, they *are* an actual historic people (Gallant 2020, 30). As the people of Gondor in *The Lord of the Rings* (as well as the reader) look back they become more aware of their identity and the significance of Aragorn as king, similar to how a Christian ‘looking back’ at the old stories of the Old Testament gains a deeper understanding of the New (Scarf 2007, 262).

#### IV. Dynamic versus Static Heroic Ethos

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<sup>14</sup> Honegger is speaking of the “divine” beauty of Galadriel, but aptly sums up the “demi-god” status as once or twice removed from divinity itself that I am attempting to illustrate here.

In a paper given at the Second International Saga Conference in Reykjavík, John Lindow (1973, 18) addressed the Icelandic Sagas as ethnographic documents. The problem he discussed was the view of the Germanic heroic ethos as an unchanging, monolithic structure ranging from the time of Tacitus until the thirteenth-century. This view, Lindow explains, was prominent in nineteenth-century philology and Germanism; however, it does not stand up to scrutiny. On the contrary, the Germanic heroic ethos (Northern courage as Tolkien (*BMC*, 20) called it) changed greatly over time in our real, or primary, world:

... We may be quite sure that around 100 A.D., at approximately the end of the common Germanic period, the Germanic chieftain was essentially a great warrior, a leader of men in battle. His closest followers were those who pledged allegiance to him in war and peace, making up his *\*druhtiz* or *comitatus*, as Tacitus calls it. We also may safely assert that West Scandinavian kingship in the thirteenth century was rather like its European model; the king was a grand figure who ruled over virtually every aspect of human life. His closest followers made up a corporation called the *hirð*, which itself was only one part of the complex court. This wide and far reaching change characterizes the differences between common Germanic and medieval Scandinavian society, and it is pointless to assume that any Germanic ethical concept or institution, like honour, could have survived so long virtually unchanged. (Lindow 1973, 18)

If a heroic code is performed identity, that is a code that identifies a warrior by the way he acts, then the implication is that Germanic identity changed as the modes of its society changed over the course of generations. This is a view taken by contemporary historians and medievalists like Lindow which is more or less today's consensus.

This is not, however, how the change manifests itself in either *The Lord of the Rings* or the larger *Legendarium* for several reasons unique to Tolkien's *Legendarium*. Firstly, the nature of narrative fiction means that such a thematic cultural change must be compressed within the parameters of either the text itself, or the 'Stoff' of the *Legendarium*. The 'history' (any history<sup>15</sup>) is simply a narrative of the chronicle events and may not concern itself with such changes. Secondly, within the mythology of the *Legendarium* there is the issue of the Elves and their immortality. The Noldor, along with their heroic ethos that exemplified Northern courage, are still present either in

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hayden White, "Historicism, History, and the Imagination," In *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University press, 1985), 109.

the generations born in exile (e.g. Elrond) or were the original rebels themselves (e.g. Galadriel). In Tolkien's *Legendarium* there is no gradual societal or cultural change nor any transition from one generation to another: the Elvish heroic ethos is a static, monolithic structure. The transition happens as the Elves wane and Men wax with a new ethos, rather than a gradual cultural change as convincingly described by Lindow. The new ethos still has traces of *das Heroische* (the heroic) but it now privileges a dedication to something bigger than simply the lord and the *comitatus*; something greater than just *lof ond dom*; it privileges *hope*. It is a proto-chivalric ethos that we see galvanizing in the Men of Middle-earth by way of Aragorn's example; that is, his exemplary performance.

In a recent article, Thomas Honegger (2017, 12) examines chivalry and Tolkien's distaste for it, and notes that "[Tolkien] does his best to avoid associations with the classical chivalric period and harks back to a simpler, more primitive and above all more secular form of chivalry" (which this discussion refers to as proto-chivalry). To better understand the motifs (*Stoff*) of a Germanic heroic ethos in transition from one tradition to another, it serves us well, as an acute example, to look at the Carolingian Franks when we examine Aragorn, Gondor, and the new heroic ethos. There are two prominent reasons for this: firstly, because Tolkien referred to the Holy Roman Empire (*Letters*, 376) when he envisioned Gondor; and secondly because Old French literature offers us an insight into an actual, historical and transitive proto-chivalry. As Honegger (2017, 20) suggests,

[T]his development parallels the one in primary world literature where we have also an evolution from the epic-heroic *chanson de geste* (e.g. the late 11<sup>th</sup> century *Le Chanson de Roland*) to courtly romance (e.g. Chrétien de Troyes *Yvain*, *Erec et Enide*, or *Lancelot*, all after 1160) as the dominant genre.

This is not to suggest that Old French literature, *Le Chanson de Roland* in particular, is the only source where a shift in heroic ethos is visible; there is an entire corpus of early medieval literature that incorporates the subject matter, themes and motifs (or *Stoff*), of an early medieval heroic ethos in transition. For example, other works such as *Das Nibelungenlied*, composed circa fifty years later than *Roland*, also transitions by use of remnant heroic elements and chivalric or proto-chivalric responses. "In terms of his own age the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* aimed at an accommodation of

traditional heroic subject-matter with newly-received chivalric notions and with the new fashion of ‘biographical’ romances, that is, narratives of a leading character’s life” (Hatto 1980, 170).

Nonetheless, *Le Chanson de Roland* provides a prime example of this transition in a literary framework from the Germanic heroic ethos of Northern courage to a proto-chivalric ethos in which we may envision the transition in *The Lord of the Rings* more clearly.

For example, in *Le Chanson de Roland* (*Laisses* 83 through 87), three times Oliver pleads with Roland to blow his horn Oliphant and call Charlemagne and the main Frankish host, and three times Roland refuses because he believes to do so will dishonor him and his men: ‘I’d rather die than be disgraced’ (*Roland*, 86.1091). It is only after Roland loses twenty thousand men and is left with sixty, that he decides perhaps now is a good time to sound his horn (*Roland*, 132.1752). In the following *Laisse* (87.1093-1094) Roland is not condemned but rather exalted: “Roland is worthy and Oliver is wise: / Both have amazing courage...”. This action is reminiscent of *ofermōd* and Earl Byrhtnoth in the ‘Battle of Maldon,’ who in his pride let the Vikings cross the causeway to fight. He subsequently lost because of it (*Maldon*, 89-95).

Roland, like Earl Byrhtnoth, suffers from *ofermōd*, his overmastering pride, which prevents him from blowing his horn for help when it would have been most useful. The refusal causes strife and hostility between Roland and his friend Oliver and Oliver strikes Roland with added insult and condemnation. However, when Oliver is mortally wounded, impaled by a spear from behind, he begs forgiveness from Roland:

I struck you, please forgive me this!  
 Roland replies: “I have suffered no injury,  
 I forgive this here and before God.”  
 After he said this, they bowed to each other,  
 See them now parting with such affection! (*Roland*, 149.2005-2009)

*The Lord of the Rings* shows us the same *Stoff* or motifs (albeit altered) and the most comparable to the verse above is the death of Boromir. In this case, Boromir is not reluctant to blow his horn, yet he falls defending Merry and Pippin, and the motif is altered:

Aragorn knelt beside his. Boromir opened his eyes and strove to speak. At last slow words came. ‘I tried to take the Ring from Frodo,’ he said. ‘I am sorry. I have paid.’ His glance strayed to his fallen enemies; twenty at least lay there … After a moment he spoke again.

‘Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed!’

‘No!’ said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. ‘You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!’ (*TT*, III, i, 16)

Like Roland at Oliver’s death, Aragorn offers forgiveness with a contradictory statement to the fallen’s remorse (‘I have failed’ and ‘You have conquered’) and shows that love forgives all prior strife and hostility. It is Tolkien’s heroic ideal that “is the heroism of obedience and love, not pride and wilfulness, that is most heroic” (*TL*, 148). Tolkien shows that love in this passage, and while we do not know if Aragorn bestows hope upon Boromir, at the very least he consoles him.

Aragorn’s mild qualities of mercy and pity allow him to deal with his subjects according to their measure, giving them hope to contribute to the effort while still retaining their honor. He asks only those that are willing to accompany him to the Black Gate and not all can find it in their hearts to follow their king. In a Germanic ethos like Northern courage, those that quailed would be considered cowards only worthy of death. But Aragorn, seeing the gravity of the situation, forgives those who are terrified of marching further:<sup>16</sup>

‘Go!’ said Aragorn. ‘But keep what honor you may, and do not run! And there is a task which you may attempt and so be not wholly shamed. Take your way south-west till you come to Cair Andros, and if that is still held by enemies, as I think, then re-take it, if you can; and hold it to the last in defense of Gondor and Rohan!’ (*RK*, V, x, 162)

This is a transitional change in the heroic code and, as Christopher Scarf has pointed out, it is a noteworthy example of Aragorn’s heroism deviating from the core tradition of Northern courage:

Aragorn may still have exhibited something of the ‘hopelessness’ of the northern spirit of courage when he pursued the Hobbits. Nevertheless, Aragorn, whose name, Estel actually means Hope, now had the Christian ‘Hope’ of life, as he put it, “Beyond the circles of the world.” (Scarf 2007, 339)

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<sup>16</sup> Charity may not be the complete story here, either. Like Charlemagne, Aragorn is a shrewd military commander and he surely knows that some soldiers are more suited to support, logistics, and rear echelon roles than others who serve as frontline shock troops. Indeed, such soldiers may be more dangerous to their comrades if they panic in the face of the enemy. Nevertheless, his wisdom and prudence in handling the situation is not unlike, and very much in character with, Notker’s anecdotes of Charlemagne and his wise, prudent decisions and actions in various situations exalting his subjects as well as humbling them.

While Aragorn carries on in the face of a hopeless situation with unyielding will, the fusion of hope with Germanic Northern courage may be the most important aspect of Aragorn's new warrior ethos. Hope is inextricably bound with recovery and renewal. Judy Ann Ford supports the concept of a Germanic hope in that

[T]he myth of the revival of Rome in *The Lord of the Rings* is presented by Tolkien as an Anglo-Saxon hope and more broadly a northern European Germanic hope, in which the idea of a revived Roman Empire, or Western Empire, had been expanded to include not only the Romans but also themselves. (Ford 2005, 68)

With *Roland*'s example, Aragorn's hopeful, new proto-chivalric ethos becomes clearer. Elements of Northern courage are still there, but we can discern a change happening. We no longer see the prevalence of overmastering pride, the burning of ships and halls, the blasphemous oaths and other vices within the framework of "the sad light of fatalism" and the "long defeat". Instead, we see a heroism that still shows unbending will and defiance in the face of certain defeat (such as the last stand before the Black Gate), but this has been fused with a sense of hope and mercy and justice provided by the example of an ideal king wielding his legitimate cultural authority.

## V. Aragorn as Renewer

The core of tradition that Aragorn carries ranges from Men's first encounter with the Noldor, through the Second Age<sup>17</sup>, the rise of Arnor and Gondor (and the fall of the former) until the War of the Ring. It is the tradition to be renewed with the coronation of Aragorn Elessar: renew with the implication of something old fused with the new and not simply revitalizing old traditions. Aragorn's renewal may include the following areas: governance, justice, cultural renewal and its core traditions. These qualities further express themselves in various aspects of Aragorn's role as an ideal king.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Akallabêth* actually shows the first time the core-tradition shift away from the Germanic heroic ethos, which would require a separate, albeit interesting, discussion. So far as this discussion is concerned, the group of persecuted Númenóreans known as 'The Faithful' who were persecuted precisely because they would not abandon the core tradition inherited from the Edain. See *Akallabêth* (S, 309-338).

As with Charlemagne, it is imperative for Aragorn's unification and his cultural authority that a consensus exists regarding the coronation of emperor and king. In Charlemagne's case, Einhard (1969, 81) tells us "He made it clear that he would not have entered the cathedral that day at all, although it was the greatest of all festivals of the church, if he had known in advance what the Pope was planning to do."<sup>18</sup> Charlemagne is performing *humilitas* and it is critical for his legitimacy. Aragorn, too, makes clear his concern over the legitimacy of his claim:

'Behold the Sun setting in a great fire! It is a sign of the ending fall of many things, and a change in the tides of the world. But this City and realm has rested in the charge of the Stewards for many long years, and I fear that if I enter it unbidden, then doubt and debate may arise, which should not be while this war is fought. I will not enter in, nor make any claim, until it be seen whether we or Mordor shall prevail. Men shall pitch my tents upon the field, and here I will await the welcome of the Lord of the City.' (*RK*, V, viii, 137)

Both kings display similar concerns. In return, they also receive symbols that legitimacy is, indeed, theirs. One was brought by an embassy from the patriarch of Jerusalem: relics from the Holy Sepulcher (Becher 2003, 12). The other Elrond surrenders to Aragorn (*RK*, VI, v, 251). Legitimacy in both cases is further conferred by spiritual leaders, thereby imparting a holiness or religiosity upon their reigns. Charlemagne, of course, was crowned by Pope Leo III signifying the blessings and will of God. Alessandro Barbero (2004, 93-94) tells us that

By putting the crown on the new emperor's head, the pope de facto claimed supremacy of papal authority over imperial authority... public acts that remained on everyone's memory also had enormous political significance. The act of Leo III placing the imperial crown on the head of the kneeling king was of this kind. The implications of this gesture could not have escaped a politician of Charlemagne's intelligence ...

Compared to Aragorn's coronation:

Then to the wonder of many Aragorn did not put the crown upon his head, but gave it back to Faramir, and said: 'By the labour and valor of many I have come into my inheritance. In token of this I would have the Ring-bearer bring the crown to me and let Mithrandir set it upon my head, if he will; for he has been the mover of all that has been accomplished, and this is his victory.' (*RK*, VI, v, 246)

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<sup>18</sup> This account is, of course, not without scholarly contention. Barbero points out that "[...] it may be that Einhard, modeling himself on Suetonius, merely wished to emphasize Charles's modesty, in the same way that Claudius had not considered himself worthy of the imperial title and had to be invested by force." Yet this strengthens the myth of legendary Charlemagne's *humilitas* and further illuminates Aragorn's *humilitas*. Alessandro Barbero, *Charlemagne: Father of a Continent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 92-93.

Not only has Gandalf been the mover of all things, but as a Maia or angelic being he also fulfills a papal, even supernatural, role; "... Gandalf, as the emissary of the Valar, bestows the divine authorization of Aragon's rule" (Honegger 2015, 13). Placing the crown on Aragorn's head subjugates the realm and its king to the spiritual authority of Eru Ilúvatar. Furthermore, Aragorn is displaying *humilitas* by acknowledging all those that made his inheritance possible, which is represented in Frodo bringing him the crown. He is also displaying *humilitas* by asking Mithrandir to place the crown on his head. The coronation is loaded with the symbolism of holy legitimacy, such as was Charlemagne's.<sup>19</sup>

Aragorn's methods of governance and administration are also vital to the new ethos and changes in the core tradition. For instance, Gandalf tells Aragorn "The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved" (*RK*, VI, v, 249). Wilson (2007, 82), citing Edward Gibbon, writes "Europe dates a new era from the restoration of the Western empire." That is the task for the king of a united West — as both Aragorn and Charlemagne are. Both kings unified a shattered world which carries a notion of the 'West'. In our own history, this notion

went back to the later Roman Empire and accelerated dramatically with the barbarian invasions. But it is precisely for this reason that such importance has to be attached to the moment in which the ancient Roman provinces that suffered the disaster and for a few centuries underwent more or less independent histories were unified by a new political entity only formally linked to the ancient one. When we say that they were unified, we do not only mean that they obeyed the same emperor, which they only did for a few decades, but that the laws, governmental institutions, and economic rules developed in one of the provinces, Gaul, dominated by the Franks, were extended to Europe as a whole. (Barbero 2004, 114)

The 'West' in Middle-earth, carries a similar yet different significance than it did for Gaul, however. First and foremost because the Valar are in the 'West', the Elves sailed into the 'West', and Númenor was in the 'West'. But also because the 'West' in continental Middle-earth means the domain of the Faithful and Dúnedain, the 'Free Peoples of Middle-earth' and other tribes. The

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<sup>19</sup> For further discussion, see Thomas Honegger, 2018. "'We don't need another hero' — Problematic heroes and their Function in Some of Tolkien's Works." In the *Proceeding of the 'J. R. R. Tolkien: Individual, Community, Society'* 5th International Conference on Tolkien in Hungary (2015).

‘West’ is Gondor, devastated Arnor, and Rohan which resemble the remnant of an *imperium* wracked by war and in need of renewal. Gondor is the last bastion of the ‘Men of the West’ which still maintains the traditional laws and governmental institutions. Ford (2005, 60) points out that “there are a great many indications throughout *The Lord of the Rings* that Gondor represents the Roman Empire as viewed through late-ancient, early-medieval northern European eyes” to which Honegger (2011, 51) adds “the situation towards the end of the Third Age, i.e. the time-frame for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, is comparable to the early European Middle Ages (i.e. between AD 500 to 750) rather than later centuries.” To paraphrase Barbero above, Aragorn’s coronation consecrated the birth of a new political space.<sup>20</sup>

Both Aragorn and Charles, however, are not thinking in terms of territory in renewing their empires. Rather, they are thinking in terms of hegemony. For Charlemagne, he

[...] had no interest in creating a “thousand-year Reich.” His conquests had not been for the glory of the Carolingian dynasty; they had been for the glory of God. What he created in the West was an *imperium Christianum*, a civilization based on divine law ... Within Charlemagne’s dominions there were numerous lands and tribes, he did not attempt the impossible task of merging their identities within a greater Francia. (Wilson 2007, 91-92)

Aragorn governs his *imperium* in a similar manner as Charlemagne, whereas Charlemagne established “an immediate authority whose task was to oversee local officials” as a “means of improving the administration of the empire” (Becher 2003, 108). Aragorn establishes Gondor’s hegemony simply through the delegation of his edicts: Rohan is left as an ally rather than a client-state. The Grey Wood, for example, clearly falls under Aragorn’s domain as shown by his right to issue an edict: ‘Behold, the King Elessar is come! The Forest of Drúadan he gives to Ghân-buri-ghân and to his folk, to be their own forever; and hereafter let no man enter it without their leave’ (*RK*, VI, vi, 254). To the Ents, he grants the valley of Orthanc (*ibid.*, 258). The Shire, also remains under Elessar’s dominion,

‘For do not forget, Peregrin Took, that you are a knight of Gondor and I do not release you from your service. You are going now on leave, but I may recall you. And remember, dear

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<sup>20</sup> For further relevant discussion of Gondor and the Holy Roman Empire, see Miryam Librán-Moreno, “Byzantium, New Rome!” In *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources*, ed. Jason Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 84-115.

friends of the Shire, that my realm lies also in the North, and I shall come there one day.’ (ibid., 260)

And he issues another edict: “that Men are not to enter the Shire, and he makes it a Free Land under the protection of the Northern Scepter” (ibid., Appendix A, 377). Bree too, is left to its own accord as Gandalf tells Barliman in Bree: “‘You will be let alone, Barliman,’ said Gandalf. ‘There is room enough for realms between Isen and Greyflood, or along the shorelands south of the Brandywine, without any one living within many days’ ride of Bree’” (*RK*, VI, vii, 272-73). Nevertheless, his edicts have the same effect as Charlemagne’s. Becher cites the *Annals of Lorsch*: “[Charlemagne] chose archbishops, and other bishops, and abbots, and dukes, and counts of his realm who had no need to take gifts from the innocent. And he sent them throughout the empire so that churches, widows, orphans, the poor, and all the people could have justice” (Becher 2003, 108). Aragorn is likewise establishing the new order of his empire through his authority as king, emissaries and Gondor’s hegemony.

Unlike Charlemagne, however, Aragorn does not conquer. His realm came to him not only through inheritance but also through a devastating defensive war and renewal after his victory. Nevertheless, it is a renewal (and also a change rooted in that renewal) of the Kingdoms of the (Númenórean) Faithful and its tradition reaches back even further. Honegger (forthcoming, 9) notes: “[T]he destiny of Tolkien’s hero is to be king and, if we interpret his re-establishment of the old unity of the double-kingdom of Arnor and Gondor as modeled upon the achievement of Charlemagne as the *renovator/restitutor imperii*, he is indeed ‘all but emperor’.” And yet the restoration carries within it the traces of the Germanic tradition, the core tradition that Aragorn inherently carries within himself. “Aragorn’s restored Gondor was more a Germanic ideal than a Roman one because his kingdom incorporated the other peoples of the west, appropriate to both the point of view of Anglo-Saxon myth-makers and to a medieval perspective” (Ford 2005, 66), to which one may add: it may be certainly *more* Germanic than Roman, but traces of the Roman are still there fused with the Germanic in a Romano-Anglo-Saxon tradition. Likewise, Aragorn fuses

traces of the old traditions with his new ideal. His ideal is the most salient but the Germanic residue is still there.

Aragorn, his kingship and his new warrior ethos of the Fourth Age also conceptualizes a new judicial foundation. No more blasphemous oaths and acts of revenge. Aragorn, like his real-world *exemplum* (but, as noted, to greater extent), instead shows mercy, pity, forgiveness and justice. He takes on a tone of mild and gentle regency. We noted above that both the historical and legendary Charlemagne spared many of his conspiring enemies. Becher (2003, 141) notes further that “During the later Middle Ages, Charlemagne was regarded not only as a saint and crusader but, especially in Germany, as the ideal lawgiver …”. Aragorn, similarly, dispenses merciful judgements:

In the days that followed his crowning the King sat on his throne in the Hall of the Kings and pronounced judgements. And embassies came from many lands and peoples, from East and the South, and from the borders of Mirkwood, and from Dunland in the west. And the King pardoned the Easterlings that had given themselves up, and sent them away free, and he made peace with the peoples of Harad; and the slaves of Mordor he released and gave them all the lands about Lake Núrnén to be their own. (*RK*, VI, v, 246-47)

Indeed, Aragorn says to Beregond: ‘Beregond, by your sword blood was spilled in the Hallows, where it is forbidden. Also you left your post without leave of Lord or Captain. *For these things, of old, death was the penalty*. Now therefore I must pronounce your doom.’ (*ibid.*, emphasis mine). Tacitus (*Germ.*, 12) tells us that in the old Germanic jurisprudence “[P]enalties are distinguished according to the offense. Traitors and deserters are hanged on trees …”. Aragorn, however, pardons Beregond for saving Faramir’s life. Aragorn is bridging the old law of the “Germanic” and dispensing justice much like Charlemagne. Notker (1969, 154-55) tells us in regards to Charlemagne’s first-born son, Pepin the Lame, and his supporters who rebelled (and would conceivably fall into the treason category) that the king exiled them to monastic life:

All the conspirators, who suspected nothing, were dealt with as they deserved before the third hour of the day, some being sent into exile and others being punished. Pepin himself, who was a dwarf and a hunchback, was given a sound whipping and was tonsured. As punishment he was sent for some time to the monastery of Saint Gall, that being among the poorest and most austere of all places in the far-flung Empire.

With consideration of mitigating circumstances, Aragorn mercifully “exiles” Beregond from the City of Minas Tirith. Simultaneously, he promotes Beregond to captain of Faramir’s honor guard in Ithilien. We may even consider this act of ‘creative exile’ as an honor dispensed under the auspices of upholding an ancient law. While both the historical and legendary Charlemagne did, indeed, pardon many of his (and Pope Leo III’s) enemies, he is neither so lenient with pagans such as the Saxons nor with Ganelon and his family in *Le Chanson de Roland*. Aragorn, however, does not massacre pagans and Saxons, rather he pardons and frees Easterlings. Miryam Librán-Moreno (Librán-Moreno 2011, 112) also notes: “[A]nother consequence that is apparent from Tolkien’s sifting of historical sources is an attempt to filter away, or at least tone down, some of the most cruel or unethical aspects that are evident in the historical material.”<sup>21</sup>

One final point related to governance is cultural renewal. Librán-Moreno (2011, 97) observes that Aragorn brings about a “cultural renaissance … by the presence and works of the stone-wrights of Erebor and the folk of Legolas…”, yet Tolkien does not spend much more time narrating the cultural renewal of Aragorn’s dominions. Nevertheless, it is there, and it is an important characteristic of a Renewal King. As the renewal of Gondor and Arnor is one of the main themes of the king’s return and we may safely assume cultural renaissance is also implied. In contrast to Tolkien, both Notker and Einhard spend considerable amounts of time discussing the educational and renovation work of Charlemagne through various anecdotes. “However much energy Charlemagne may have expended in enlarging his realm and conquering foreign nations, and despite all the time which he devoted to this preoccupation, he nevertheless set in hand many projects which aimed at making his kingdom more attractive and at increasing public utility” (Einhard 1969, 71). The two biographers impress upon the reader that not only is the renovation work as important as Charlemagne’s military prowess and piety, but that it is inherently woven into the fabric of Charlemagne’s achievements. It is clear that for both of these monarchs “… kingship

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<sup>21</sup> Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*. Revised Edition (London: Harper Collins, 2005), 232, 319. Shippey has previously noted this as have I in regard to Fëanor’s deeds as a Germanic hero (personal citation, 117).

means much more than mere military power..." (Honegger forthcoming, 9). It means cultural authority.

## VI. Aragorn's Epiphany: The Sapling of Nimloth the Fair

Aragorn, however, has his doubts. As his uncertainty gnaws at him, he experiences an epiphany and both the narrative and poetic symbolism of Romance moves to what Frye calls the comic area. Gandalf led Aragorn outside the City by night. In Frye's terms, this is an angelic Prospero-figure leading the Renewal King from the 'mineral' world of the city into the divine world of the gods. Mount Mindolluin is full of imagery: lofty peaks and the alpine pastures of the idyllic 'vegetable' world. There the king surveys his realm as far as he can see. Doubt lingers within him of his task and his destiny for the new millennium, 'The Third Age is ended, and the new age is begun: and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved' says Gandalf (*RK*, VI, v, 249). This scene is *almost* a *Fürstenspiegel*, or 'Mirror of Princes'. That is, a genre "dealing with the moral instruction of princes," which, appropriately for our discussion, "originated in the early ninth century at the Carolingian court" (Scanlon 1994, 82). While a separate genre than *exempla*, the *Fürstenspiegel* still has rhetorical similarities which illustrate a kingly *exemplum*. Aragorn, while doubtful at this moment, portrays an example of kingly *humilitas* that allows Gandalf to instruct him further in divine matters.

'But I shall die,' continues Aragorn. 'For I am a mortal man ... And who shall govern Gondor and those who look to this City as their queen, if my desire be not granted? The Tree in the Court of the Fountain is still withered and barren. When shall I see a sign that it will ever be otherwise?' (*RK*, VI, v, 249). The king still doubts, and the imagery of the king juxtaposed with "withered and barren" suggests the land-and-king-are-one mythological metaphor. Perhaps Aragorn feels that the core of tradition, all those cultural artifacts and ethos, are barren and withered as well. That the land (or rather its representation in the White Tree — another symbol of Aragorn's legitimacy) is withered is cause for Aragorn's doubt and tinge of deathly despair. But Gandalf urges

Aragorn to look away from the green land of his earthly realm and look *exactly* where all *seems* barren and cold. There he sees a small, new sapling which “already it had put forth young leaves long and shapely, dark above and silver beneath, and upon its slender crown it bore one small cluster of flowers whose white petals shone like the sunlit snow” (*ibid.*, 250). The sapling is descended from Nimloth, the White Tree of Númenor.<sup>22</sup> The White Tree not only represents the king and the land, but it is also apocalyptic in the original sense of a revelation. Frye suggests that this is the symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment, and which we propose to call the point of epiphany. It’s most common settings are the mountaintop, [etc.]. (Frye 2000, 203)

Aragorn has received his sign. His epiphany may be seen as divine as it, in the context of re-newal, recalls the Golden Age of Men when they first set eyes “upon the faces that beheld the Light of Valinor” (*S*, 173). It is a divine confirmation of Aragorn fulfilling his destiny as the Renewal King; of renewing the ancient as well as the new Golden Age within the historical framework of the new millennium. Furthermore, the epiphany seems to erase any lingering seed of (Morgoth’s inspired) despair that poisoned Men’s willingness to choose Ilúvatar’s Gift of death. Following this episode, Aragorn returns to the ‘green world’ of Romantic Summer, to his comedic wedding … on Midsummer’s Day.

Lastly, Aragorn’s death *ad exemplum*, defines his character and the new heroism and at the same time reestablishes (or re-news) an ancient tradition. Harald Haferland (2010, 208) describes the demise of the Germanic hero thusly:

Germanic heroic poetry – like all heroic poetry – tells of conflict and hostility, but its hero, oddly enough, is not a victorious one. On the contrary, he often must accept his own demise and the death of those close to him, and his heroism displays itself with decidedly greater clarity in demise than in victory.

Fëanor initiated the Germanic narrative through his freedom of choice and he performed according to its heroic ethos. Aptly, Fëanor was not victorious: he was encircled, beaten down and mutilated

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<sup>22</sup> “And a seedling they [the Eldar] brought of Celeborn, the White Tree that grew in the midst of Eressëa; and that was in its turn a seedling of Galathilion the Tree of Túna, the image of Telperion that Yavanna gave to the Eldar in the Blessed realm. And the tree grew and blossomed in the courts of the King in Armenelos; Nimloth it was named, and flowered in the evening, and the shadows of night it filled with fragrance.” (*S*, 314)

by Balrogs and in his death Fëanor's corpse burst into flame. He died a powerfully defiant and heroic death. Aragorn, on the other hand freely chooses his time to die and lays down to endless sleep; it is noble and full of grace, but not heroic in the Germanic sense: it is, rather, an ethical and moral victory. It is the correct choice and use of gifts according to the divine plan. Most importantly, his death is vital to renewal. Not simply essential for renewing Gondor to its former glory, or even renewing some semblance of the Númenórean sacred kings. Rather, his death holds a significance for the restoration of a golden age of Men in the Fourth Age. Although his deathbed is "strikingly devoid of the sacraments, of Extreme Unction, of the consolation of religion" (Shippey 2005, 229) it does attempt to restore the innocence of the Men of the First Age: Men, who were an idyllic *Naturvolk* in communion with the Powers in the world. Their tradition of choosing death reached all the way back to the *Stammvater*, Bëor the Old, when he "at the last had relinquished his life willingly and passed in peace..." (S, 173). And the Elves stood in amazement at Eru Ilúvatar's Gift to Men.

## VII. Conclusion

At the end of the 'Tragic Autumn' and its *ubi sunt* sentiment, a new heroic ethos arises in the absence of heroic Elvendom, its *wyrd*, and its tradition of Northern courage. It is an ethos defined by proto-chivalric virtues such as *caritas* and *humilitas* – and most importantly hope – rather than fatalistic defiance. A new ethos that imparts an emotional significance of the waxing 'Romantic Summer.' The agency of this Renewal King is instrumental in renewing the virtuous norms and values of the old traditions, while at the same time, fusing them with new traditions. This fusion allows the narrative to plausibly shift into a new direction by illustratively narrating the great deeds and ethos of Aragorn *ad bonum exemplum* and a new *dianoia*, or theme, underlying the heroic ethos. By doing so, Tolkien follows a pattern that the Old Saxon *Heliand* author also followed by forming a new Germanic-Christian synthesis of the ideal man: a composite of personal

strength and interior gentleness, a “heroic chest with a kind heart inside” (Murphy 1995, 86-87): only absent are the outwardly and explicit Christian accoutrements.

This is the “career pattern” of the Renewal King that we also associate with the ideal kings in our own historical and literary works, such as Charlemagne. Illustrating the *exemplum* of renewal are the modes in which both Aragorn and Charlemagne administer and renew their realms by their cultural authority, which differ only in the details while the larger patterns remain recognizably the same. While Aragorn carries the pedigree and core traditions of his kingly destiny, his sudden appearance upon the scene in Middle-earth makes it necessary for Aragorn to rightly use them, as the traditions not only define his identity (and by extension his people and other peoples who join their group), but they also give him legitimacy and authority to accomplish renewal. Subsequently, the core-tradition is altered. Part of that core of tradition are the symbols that represent it, such as Barahir’s Ring and Andúril. While another part of that core tradition are the norms and customs (the heroic code) which govern actions and define the actor or actors by illustrative and exemplary deeds. We witness the heroic deeds of Men at the beginning of this tradition in the ancient battle of the *Dagor Bragollach* and we see it at the Battle at the Black Gate. But this time, it differs in that Aragorn’s treatment of his less heroic subjects and soldiers. It explicitly shows the fusion, or transition, of Northern courage into a new proto-chivalric heroic ethos.

Aragorn’s renewal of Gondor’s hegemony consists of many aspects of governance, as is suitable for a king, but only four are treated here. Both Aragorn and Charlemagne show the same pattern in how their legitimacy is acknowledged; how their governance and administration enacts policies within the paradigm of the new ethos; how they dispense justice in accordance with the virtues of the new ethos; and the cultural renewal that allows for implementing cultural change (i.e. a change in the core tradition) for the new millennium. *The Lord of the Rings* is a heroic romance in which the mythological dimension is closely tied to kingship. Aragorn’s epiphany confirms his legitimacy, both divinely and symbolically to himself and his realm. It prepares Gondor for a New Golden Age. It is the *Stoff* of myth.

Finally, Aragorn's death realizes a renewal in the wise and correct use of Ilúvatar's Gift to Men. Not only renewing a core traditional aspect of the ancient Númenóreans, but reaching further back to the idyllic when the first recorded incident of freely choosing the Gift of Ilúvatar was performed. Not coincidentally, it was performed by Aragorn's '*Stammvater*' Bëor the Old, who, by his exemplary act, inspired awe and wonder in the Eldar and set a model for Men to follow. It seems now that we have returned full circle as the land of the West lays snugly under the King's Peace. Aragorn Elessar dies with grace and renews the realm full of piety and goodness. We find ourselves at the end of story in a happily-ever-after state. Until, of course, there is another Fall, and the history of Middle-earth again becomes 'storial'. That story,<sup>23</sup> however, will never come and we may enjoy the satisfaction of the Romantic Summer happily-ever-after.

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<sup>23</sup> Tolkien started a sequel to *Lord of the Rings* that he called *The New Shadow*. However, he soon abandoned the project considering it nothing more than "cheap thriller." See *The Peoples of Middle-earth XII*, Chapter XVI, in *The History of Middle-earth III*. London: Harper Collins 2002. pp. 410-421.

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